

# *Documents on Diplomacy: Resources*

## *Briefing Memo: The Later Cold War (1961-1987)*

America's new, young President, John F. Kennedy brought a sense of excitement and progress to his foreign policy, whether it was rebuilding battered alliances or envisioning an American future in space. But in reality, he followed the Cold War containment policies of his predecessors, and learned a harsh lesson during a failed invasion at the Bay of Pigs in Cuba. In 1962, Kennedy faced the most dangerous situation thus far in the conflict with the USSR when evidence surfaced of new Soviet missile bases in Cuba; bases that would give the Soviets the ability to send nuclear weapons deep into the heart of the United States. Kennedy stood firm—risking nuclear war—and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev backed down. The Soviet Union continued on the offensive in Berlin, erecting a wall through the divided city and eventually completely separating East and West Germany. Although the wall remained, Kennedy turned it into something of a public relations triumph when he visited West Berlin and declared his solidarity with the German people.

Kennedy's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, wanted to be known for his progressive vision of the future, but was remembered instead for the escalation of the war in Vietnam. In 1967, a war broke out in the Middle East between Israel and its Arab neighbors, which would also have long-term consequences for the United States. The United States joined Great Britain in sponsoring a resolution in the UN Security Council calling for "land for peace"—the return of captured Arab territory in return for recognition of the right of Israel to exist. UN Security Council Resolution 242 is still the basis for America's diplomatic position in the area today.

### *Nixon's Diplomacy*

The presidential election of 1968 brought former Vice President Richard Nixon to power. Nixon and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger believed the world had changed and that the United States could not carry all of its burdens. Nations that wanted American aid would have to participate actively in their own defense. They also believed that the United States could gain some advantage by playing the two major communist powers—the USSR and China—against each other. They successfully negotiated

important nuclear arms control measures with the Soviet Union and dramatically changed U.S. foreign policy by initiating contact with the People's Republic of China.

But the secrecy that brought President Nixon success also brought about his downfall and Congress advanced its own agenda focused on a human rights issue, the emigration of Jews, with the Soviet Union. The administration of his successor, President Gerald Ford, had some success on the diplomatic front, but was lesser successful in addressing a new and dangerous vulnerability of the United States: dependence on the oil resources of the volatile Middle East. Ford's successor, President Jimmy Carter also tried—unsuccessfully—to address the same issue.

Although President Carter carried on the Cold War policies of his predecessors, he was committed to changing the direction of U.S. foreign policy by bringing back a moral and idealistic focus. He had some success in negotiating a peace treaty between the Egyptians and the Israelis, but another problem in the same part of the world would torpedo his presidency.

### *Calamity in Iran*

Since the administrations of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon, the United States looked to the friendly nations of Saudi Arabia and Iran to protect its interests in the oil-rich Middle East and had supplied them with almost unlimited arms. Unfortunately, especially in the case of Iran, the United States was silent on the corruption and abuses of Iran's leader, Shah Reza Pahlavi. In early 1979, a revolution replaced the Shah with an Islamic fundamentalist government under a religious leader, the Ayatollah Khomeini. When President Carter allowed the Shah into the United States for medical treatment, student radicals seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and held its diplomats hostage. Although buoyed by the support of allies and the United Nations, Carter was unable to negotiate the release of the hostages. The United States seemed helpless and Carter's conservative critics attacked his foreign policy for its ineffectiveness.

But Iran was not the last of Carter's Middle Eastern problems. In January 1980, the Soviet Union invaded the state of Afghanistan, and the United States sent covert aid to the Islamic rebels who were resisting. The President warned against the danger to the oil fields of the Middle East and announced the Carter Doctrine, which said that the United States considered the Persian Gulf vital to its national security and would use force in its defense.

The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 brought to power a conservative known for his unrelenting opposition to communism and his contempt for the malaise of the Carter years. Reagan went

on the attack, but met his Soviet counterpart, Mikhail Gorbachev at four high level summits that eased relations between the two superpowers—and prepared the way for the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

But as the Cold War petered out, new—and very different—global challenges emerged. A frightening illness began to kill people all around the world and scientists warned of what appeared to be a grave threat to the environment and called on world leaders to join together for immediate action. ■